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## THE ART WORK OF THE KINDERGARTEN

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It would seem that the end in view of all art is twofold: first the power to see the visible facts of the universe perfectly, and then to express those facts in an original, serviceable, and beautiful fashion. At the same time, artistic production was not prompted in the first instance by love of the beautiful, but the basis for it was entirely practical, and its development was due to power of observation and skill of hand acquired from practical causes.<sup>1</sup>

Observation and child-study show that children's artistic productions follow the same law. The child does not spontaneously reproduce the thing which he considers pretty, but the thing with which he has been interested practically and concretely: in other words, he tells about the things which are important to him.

Following the trend of earlier phases of art and adhering to the psychological law that drawings should at first be a means of reinforcing or dwelling upon some interesting experience of the child,<sup>2</sup> the art work of the kindergarten must be the outgrowth

<sup>1</sup> Most of the productions of the primitive peoples have not proceeded from purely aesthetic motives, but have been intended at the same time to serve some practical purpose, and frequently the latter appears undoubtedly the prime motive, while the aesthetic demand is satisfied but secondarily.

"Decoration among the primitive peoples arose from practical causes—the desire to please the other sex, the fortifying of social distinctions, as marks of recognition, as symbols, as property marks, emblems. Ornamentation possesses a secondary character—pleasing forms attach themselves to the practical significant features only as the tendrils of a young climbing plant to the branches of a tree. But later on the vine develops faster and more richly than the tree, and finally the form of the tree almost disappears under the dense green foliage and bright blossoms of the vine."—Grosse, *The Beginnings of Art*.

<sup>2</sup> The start must be imaginative, not simply ought to be. Even in drawing objects, the child will draw from his image, not from the object itself; there is no road from the object to the child's motor nerves and hand except by imagining his mental picture of the object. The use of the object is therefore simply to help in the construction of the image.

of what the child thinks about and does, and also be something which he takes pleasure in doing. The moment the joy of work ceases, that moment the artistic element ceases also. "Art is the joy of the workman in his work." Ruskin states that he who works with his hands only is a mechanic; he who works with hands and head is an artisan; and he who works with head, hands, and heart is an artist. Therefore the art work of the child must be, like the dance or the song or the story, a joyful output, stimulated by the more practical work of the day. The whole being is then concentrated—feeling, mind, and body.

As has been said, the child's drawings are akin to his speech,<sup>3</sup> and so the forms he makes are akin to the words of his speech; fragmentary and detached in their relation to each other, but very vitally united to the child's life. It would be as easy and practical to teach him the letters *cat* before allowing him to say "cat," as it would be to teach him type-forms before allowing him to make a life-form. He talks spontaneously of the things which interest him, and he draws or models just as spontaneously those things he cares about. He draws these, just as he speaks of them, hoping his ideas may be understood; and he should be encouraged to draw or model, just as he is encouraged to talk—for the sake of expressing an idea clearly, never to show off his skill.<sup>4</sup> All criticism here should tend to lead him to discover wherein his expression is not clear or complete; it should help him

<sup>3</sup> "In fact, drawing for a very young child is so thoroughly a language that we may be wrong in considering it in any degree an art-expression. One is startled to see how easily a child of this age (under six) declares a mass of meaningless lines to be a man, a horse or an engine."—Barnes, *Child-Study and Art Education*.

Messonier thought drawing the basis of primary education. He said: "It is the only language which can express all things. An outline, even if ill-shaped, conveys a more exact idea of a thing than the most harmonious sentences in the world. Drawing is absolute truth, and the language of truth should be taught everywhere."

<sup>4</sup> "Art is interpretation—there must always be an idea to express."

"Wherever art is practiced for its own sake and the delight of the workman is in what he does and produces, instead of what he interprets or exhibits, then art has an influence of the most fatal kind on brain and heart, and if long so pursued issues in destruction both of intellectual power and moral principle; whereas art devoted humbly and self-forgetfully to the clear state-

to find out about things and get a better image. For instance, if he draws a man without arms, ask him how the man can put on his hat, etc.; or if he has reached the landscape stage and has placed a horse in the sky, ask him on what the horse stands.

Instead of type-forms preceding the expression of feeling or ideas, it is out of the expression of ideas that type-forms and technique may easily be developed. A child will draw straight lines by the hour to represent a mouse running to its hole, a train moving on the track; or he will draw a square (accurately, too) to represent a policeman going around the block; or a circle round which the children march. Other type-forms, oblongs, triangles, diamonds, etc., are easily produced, if only they are related to an idea which interests the child; in other words, related to those things of which he has experience—father, mother, animals, toys, family occupations, or home utensils. He will draw a line to represent a walk he has taken, placing on either side houses, trees, playmates, or any objects of interest he has passed; and usually both his line of direction and its relation to the objects are true.

Thus form, like words, becomes necessary to the child as a means of expression, not as an abstract, mechanical thing; and skill in modeling or drawing the things he wishes is acquired easily and quickly. Knowledge of size and number also becomes a matter of necessity in the same way. Even an adult will verify his instinctive conception of the number of a chicken's toes, the shape of its body, and the size of its head, if he attempts to draw it, especially from memory. The boy in kindergarten does better as a rule than the adult; for he can draw an engine with a knowledge of the form, size, number, and relation of its parts which sends his cadet-teacher on a tour of inspection.

In the beginning, nothing is more important than the necessity of making the various senses alert and bright by constant and systematic use. The ment and record of the facts of the universe is always helpful and beneficent to mankind, full of comfort, strength, and salvation."—Ruskin.

"The reason we give instruction in art is that we may familiarize men and women with divine ideas, first as they appear in the representations of those clear-sighted men who have seen them first, and then as they appear in nature itself. In this way we convince them that nature is but the visible, audible, and tangible expression of divine ideas."—Thomas Davidson.

perceptive faculties should be made accurate, the memory correct, the thinking and willing powers strong and true by direct use on things. These capacities and faculties diminish very rapidly for lack of use, and at certain stages the organism refuses to work, and the best impressions possible are dull and fleeting. Mental structure must be made by children coming into contact first hand with things, receiving and assimilating all possible sense impressions, and making all possible movements and reactions.

Therefore when the child is interested in trying to make these objects, it is the time to encourage him in every possible way, or later he will have lost his keen interest.

The derivation of one form from another scarcely seems to have a more conscious place here than would the grammatical construction of his sentences before he had learned words. He tries to seize upon forms as he seizes upon words, because he needs them for a purpose; later he both puts them together and pulls them apart.

The question naturally arises as to the place of decorative art in the kindergarten. If by decorative art is meant the making of borders and patterns, it occupies a very small place.<sup>5</sup> The child loves repetition and rhythm, but if he must labor long and painfully making and placing each unit of his design or border, the object of the work is defeated; he will become bored and tired and hate the work.<sup>6</sup> He certainly should never be set to making "abstract design," for there is no such thing in kindergarten or out. Decorative design means the making of a harmonious pattern in a given space for a given purpose. There are few opportunities for the kindergarten child to practice this, because,

<sup>5</sup> "All of a child's spontaneous drawings before he is six years old are pictorial. Mrs. Maitland found only 5 per cent. of the children at this age drawing geometrical designs and only 3 per cent. using ornaments. In illustrating stories, Barnes found less than 1 per cent. using ornamental forms; Lukens found 2 per cent. using geometrical designs and decoration combined. As we have repeatedly said, drawing is for these young children a language akin to speech."—Barnes, *Child-Study and Art Education*.

<sup>6</sup> "To subordinate a child to type-forms, to things, to the Parthenon, to the practice of decorative design, or even to manual training is *materialism*.

"These things, like the Sabbath, are made for man, for the child, not the child for them. They must be simply his to help him to the best utterances of himself, to sincerity, genuineness, unconsciousness, and power. Imagination is expression; technique is that phase of expression which helps realize more perfectly the vision, the inner image."—John Dewey, *Psychology of Drawing*.

as a rule, the objects he has to decorate demand patterns too small for him to make without physical injury. Even when he does make designs, he is rarely, if ever, prompted by a conscious aesthetic motive, but rather by the same laws of repetition and rhythm which prompt him to dance, skip, or sing. It is obvious in the light of the above, however, that he should choose and arrange his own units to suit his own taste. Moreover, the medium must be such as will give quick results, so that he may be conscious of the product as a whole. "Product and climax" should be near enough together for him to realize the reward of his labors. One form of this kind of decorative design is excellent, however, and that is stringing beads. If the beads are carefully selected as to color and form, the child is particularly happy in making combinations out of them. But even in this simple form of design, when uninteresting units and vulgar colors are given him to combine, it is as harmful as would be the hearing or singing of discordant and vulgar music, particularly because first impressions are so lasting.

A vessel deep man's virgin spirit is:  
When the first water poured therein is foul,  
The sea might pass and not wash out the stain.

—De Musset.

There is a phase of decorative art which helps arouse aesthetic feeling in the child. This is the putting of things in right places. Setting any object in the room in a suitable and harmonious place; hanging a picture; putting a flower into a vase; arranging a shelf; choosing a cupboard-curtain—all these are matters of decorative art. Little children are striving for balance constantly, and they like regular, symmetrical arrangements. Setting a table furnishes a practical piece of work, out of which may be developed knowledge of form, size and number, as well as some feeling for space-relations and color. Laying out a garden plot leads to absorbingly interesting and widely varied ideas as to form, size, number, and space-relations.

The aim of the art work of the kindergarten seems to be largely confined to the following points: (1) cultivation of imagination and expression; (2) increased power of observation;

(3) some manual training; (4) a slight degree of aesthetic feeling.

As to the four media commonly used for accomplishing the above results, clay, paints, paper, and crayons, clay is perhaps the best for the youngest children; for, in it, solids can be represented as solids, without the confusion which results from having to represent an object of three dimensions on a flat surface. Clay develops the larger muscles, not the finer ones, *if properly handled*; mistakes can quickly be rectified without spoiling the whole; and clay furnishes a natural and easy transition from work in solids to work in the mass on a flat surface; that is, work in high relief, to be followed by work in low relief. This makes an easy step to painting in flat washes, and then the representation of solids on a flat surface. Clay can be utilized in the making of borders (if children are interested in decorating a room). It gives opportunity for quick repetition of any interesting unit, which in turn gives rise to invention and logical thinking on the part of the child. Nothing is better than clay for pictorial or representative work for children of kindergarten age and even younger.

While clay deals particularly with form, painting gives the child a chance to revel in color; and paper-cutting combines both color and form. The latter has its dangers, but may be successfully used in the hands of a skilful teacher.

The use of crayons (large ones) should be encouraged constantly,<sup>7</sup> and it is the chief business of the teacher to watch each individual child and develop his power to see more accurately. This will not be done by placing objects before him for him to copy,<sup>8</sup> but by having him work from memory after he has become

<sup>7</sup> "During the cataloguing stage from two to six a child should do a great deal of drawing. He should draw figures on large surfaces, which should be so placed as to encourage activity of the central muscle masses. The subjects should be men, women, babies, animals, toys, and the like. Expression being the important thing at this period, all criticism should be made subordinate and incidental enough, so as not to discourage effort or weaken zest.

"All art development at this period is a by-product of general doing and thinking, as it must largely always be."—Barnes, *Child-Study and Art Education*.

<sup>8</sup> "But the child is interested in objects only from the standpoint they play

familiar with the object, has felt of it, talked about it, knows its uses, its life, its resemblance to other objects in color, form, size, etc. Then after he has made his drawing, the teacher can stimulate his curiosity by skilful questioning to go back to the object for a more correct impression.

It is impossible to separate art work from the other activities of the kindergarten. Everything which aids the child's vision, or which increases his artistic ability; everything which calls forth his choice and use of color, form and arrangement, or stimulates into action his power of expression, belongs to the child's realm of art. The art work of the kindergarten is by no means confined to the use of clay, paint, paper, crayon, or beads. Like the warp of the weaver, it is intimately connected with the whole pattern.

So much for the aims of the kindergarten art work. Now, as to method, there is but one thing to be said, and that must needs be said with emphasis: All depends upon the teacher. If there is one thing more than another which Froebel insists upon, it is that the teacher shall be what she expects the child to be.

in his life, their use, their function, their purpose or service. Hence there is crudity, lack of proportion, lack of qualities of structure and form, hence symbolism serves as a sign, not as a conveyance. It serves to stimulate, to vivify; its main value is reactive, freeing the child and giving him hold upon his own imagery. It must first be judged from this standpoint, its liberating power.

"But the reaction ought to go to the point of forming a new mode of vision on the part of the child, and allowing this new mode of experience to control his motor expression; otherwise, after a certain point is passed, slovenly habits both of seeing and moving are acquired.

"The first consideration is the doing, the use; after use comes method, the how of doing. Now method must exist not for its own sake, but for better self-expression, fuller and more interested doing.

"Hence these two points; technique must grow out of free imaginative expression; it must grow up within and come out of such expression; it must always and at once be turned back into such imaginative expression.

"The object is meant to fulfil a function, to stimulate to look again; an image is formed, then the movement is controlled by that new vision. Thus technique arises normally. When the technique is mechanical, there is no meaning, no idea to it, and there results this psychological evil that the imagery is as uncontrolled as before; no new mode of seeing is acquired. It is so completely an abstract that it ceases to be an element of the original object and not a universal one at that."—John Dewey, *Psychology of Drawing*.



In this case, it means to be alive to the world of beauty in which she lives, and be able in a fair degree to represent it. In every other mode of expression, such as walking, talking, singing, or dancing, the child has ample opportunity for imitation. The same thing is true in the industrial activities; but almost never does he see anyone modeling, painting, or drawing. When the teacher herself has had her own aesthetic sense awakened and her power of expression trained, she will then, and then only, be able to direct the child's first efforts.